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Non Panna Cotta with a Strawberry Compote

Panna cotta is a smooth, creamy Italian custard-type dessert that literally translates as “cooked cream” in English, which to me sounds as charming as a boiled onion. Thanks English. This fine dessert is traditionally made with sugar, vanilla, cream, and gelatin as it’s gelling agent. If you’re trying to reduce your consumption of animal products, you might consider avoiding the typical gelatin as it’s made from collagen that’s been extracted from by-products of the meat industry. That’s right friends, Jell-o is actually wiggly, jiggly, colourful blobs of animal.

Luckily, there a few great plant-based gelling agents such as agar agar, derived from the cell walls of a red algae. Agar agar sets faster and at a higher temperature than animal gelatin, which translates to me as less waiting time ‘till dessert. Big box “health” food stores will carry it, but I recommend you look it at Asian food markets first, it’s way cheaper as it’s commonly used in Thai and Vietnamese sweets.

Here’s my take on a vegan vanilla “panna cotta”, while not true to its Italian heritage, it’s still kick-ass awesome and kinder to your ol’ belly.

You’ll need:

3 tablespoons of agar agar flakes (or 3 teaspoons of the powder)
2 ¼ cups of soy creamer, or other non-dairy milk (coconut or rice milk works great too)
1 ½ cups of yogurt
2 teaspoons of vanilla extract
1/3 cup of sugar
a pinch o’ salt

2 cups of strawberries (any fresh berries will do), hulled and halved
1/3 cup of orange juice
3 teaspoons of sugar
a pinch o’ salt

- 1.** In a medium sized pot, stir together the creamer with the sugar and agar flakes. Let it sit for few minutes for the agar agar to soften.
- 2.** Over medium heat, bring the creamer mixture to a low simmer and stir until the sugar and agar agar has dissolved. It’ll take about 10 minutes. While you’re waiting, make the compote. (See 5)
- 3.** Take the pot off the heat and whisk in the yogurt and vanilla.
- 4.** Pour the mixture into cups, ramekins, or any fancy-pants moulds you may have and put them in the fridge to chill and set. It will take about 2 hours, or if you’re in a pinch for time, say a hot date is coming and you haven’t even showered, put them in the freezer for 30 minutes then transfer them to chill in the fridge.
- 5.** For the strawberry compote, whisk the sugar, orange, and pinch o’ salt together until the sugar has dissolved.
- 6.** Add the strawberries into the mixture and toss until well coated.
- 7.** Pop ‘er in the fridge until you’re ready to serve the non panna cotta.